

March 2003
Volume 6, Issue 3
Publication of the
**Sacramento
Organization for
Rational Thinking
(SORT)**

Inside This Issue

1

March 26, 2003 Meeting:
A NATION OF VICTIMS?

WAR AND RATIONAL
THOUGHT

2

OUR EQUAL TIME POLICY

3

FROM THE BOOKSHELVES
AND ON THE NET

A PINKER ALERT

4

THE RATIONAL COMMUNITY
CALENDAR

For past issues, bibliography, links to other skeptics, and more, check out the SORT Website:

www.quiknet.com/~kitray/index1.html

For more about the co-founders of SORT, see

www.spangenburgandmoser.com

**March
SORT Meeting
Wednesday,
March 26, 2003
7:00 P.M.**

Room 1, Library
Kinney High School
2710 Kilgore Rd., Rancho Cordova
(See driving directions)

The *SORTified* NEWS

“Doubt is the beginning of wisdom.”

—Clarence Darrow

March 26 SORT Meeting A NATION OF VICTIMS?

Have advocacy groups, “support groups,” therapists, and lawyers turned America into a society of victims? It’s a complex question and not one easily answered. Certainly a single week spent watching television talk shows is enough to make one cynical. Second hand smoke we are told kills us and fast food purveyors are engaged in an active conspiracy to make us fat. Literally millions of Americans have been abducted and experimented on by aliens from UFOs and there are even support groups for the children of alien abductees. Fathers are afraid to hug their children, fearing charges of child molestation coming out of therapy and “support” groups twenty years later. We are all, we are told, underachievers or overachievers, molested or molesters, suffering from lack of “self esteem” or “too self-centered.” A wink can be an act of harassment, an ill-chosen word an “assault.” Each of us, it seems, is a victim of someone or something, and each of us, we are told, deserves recompense, either monetarily or “spiritually” for offenses committed against us.

While television talk shows and best-selling “self-help” books may unintentionally demonstrate the absurdities of the whole situation to the rational thinker, we also have to take care that we don’t (metaphorically speaking...dear lawyers) “throw the

baby out with the bathwater.”

Children *are* molested, women and minorities *are* often harassed and assaulted. Crimes *are* committed against our health by money-grubbing corporations.

How have legitimate concerns and good intentions been turned into profitable carnivals of absurdity and Americans into self-professed victims ready to weep on cue for money or fame? What can and should be done about it?

Join us this month at SORT and our open round table discussion as we discuss this important and controversial issue. As usual free coffee (leaded and unleaded), soft drinks, cookies and assorted goodies will be on hand to help feed the conversation. The new location for SORT meetings is the library at Kinney High School, 2710 Kilgore Road, Rancho Cordova. (See driving directions on page 3.)



RATIONAL THINKING IN TIME OF WAR

As Thursday, March 20 dawns, many Americans face the news of war with mixed feelings. Now, perhaps more than ever, life’s challenges call for the rational

side of our nature to take hold where emotions run the gamut from fear to anger to embarrassment and shame to impatience to complacency and indifference, and on and on. These emotions touch deep, basic chords within us all. The coming days may test our abilities to think critically and soundly. May we stand the test wisely and well, whatever those feelings may be.

OUR EQUAL TIME POLICY

Come on, folks, we don't always think that the popular media is sensationalist, scruffy, and just plain bad. Sometimes we must admit they do give us some excellent information and advice. So, giving the press its due this month (well, that is if you really want to go out on a limb and call the forever-enticing *Weekly World News* the press. Here, then, we offer this month's *WWN*'s sage counsel—"10 Ways to Tell If Your Co-Worker Is an Extraterrestrial!" All right now—take a close look at that person sitting next to you!

1. Aliens often wear huge sunglasses to hide their eyes. Most aliens have large, staring eyes that are hard to conceal. Sunglasses help them appear more normal.
2. Aliens have cold and clammy skin. Many aliens wear synthetic skin in order to pass themselves off as human. It's never as warm as real skin, and it often feels "slimy" to the touch.
3. They smell. Aliens use all manner of deodorants, perfumes, or lotions to disguise their natural scent, which is offensive to humans.
4. Aliens are obsessed with technology. They spend hours

chatting on cell phones and sending e-mails. But they're not conversing with people—they're actually transmitting data they've accumulated back to their home worlds.

5. Aliens have strange bodily proportions. The newest breeds of aliens attempt to imitate human appearance—but they never quite get it right. They are like exaggerated ideas of human perfection. Their stomachs are too flat, their chests too big, their faces wrinkle-free.
6. Aliens have strange diets. Aliens may not be able to digest most human foods. Because of this, they are limited in the types of foods they can eat, and they may become vegetarians. Watch out for people who eat a lot of melons—that's an alien favorite.
7. Aliens dance in inhuman ways. Most alien species have a completely different physiology than ours. They have the ability to move their bodies to music in a way no ordinary human can, and this results in a dancing style that is quite breathtaking.
8. Aliens do not understand Earth's sense of humor. Forget what you saw on *Mork and Mindy*. Aliens find it difficult to understand laughter—even a simple knock-knock joke can throw them completely off. They might laugh at inappropriate times—like during a funeral—or stare blankly at the funniest jokes.
9. Aliens dress in oddly revealing clothes. Aliens find clothing irritates their flesh, so the less of it they wear, the more comfortable they are. They also like to keep their fake human skin exposed to air, to allow it to breathe.

The Sacramento Organization for Rational Thinking (SORT). . .

- Is dedicated to the promotion of rational thinking in all areas of life.
- Upholds the superiority of science over the mystical.
- Promotes and supports all efforts of intelligent communication that provide a counterpoint to the strong waves of anti-rationalism, irrationalism, and mysticism sweeping the world today.

Toward these ends we . . .

- Host a monthly discussion group.
- Publish a monthly newsletter.
- Host special events, talks, and presentations.
- Host a web page.

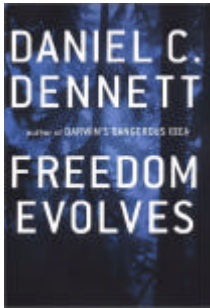
While SORT began with and still continues to be concerned with the promotion of critical thinking in areas dealing with the pseudo-scientific, the paranormal, the mystical, and the fraudulent, we strongly promote critical thinking in *all* areas of human thought and endeavor.

The core of SORT activities is our discussion group. The art of intelligent conversation is not dead. We at SORT believe that rational conversation--the meeting of minds, the free exchange of ideas and the provocative stimulation of critical questions-- is one of the most civilized and enlightening of all human activities.

SORT discussion topics have ranged from UFOs to the Holocaust, from "alternative medicine" to the problems in communicating science to the public, from classic and recent cons and scams to the teaching of critical thinking. Our discussions are hosted by one of the SORT founders, and participants are by no means limited to experts (although they may include experts) but are made up of intelligent and questioning people concerned with the topic of the evening.

10. (Well . . . we picked this up from their online site. They promise to give you number 10 if you shell out the dough for their hard copy edition.)

In the meantime—has anyone taken a close look at Madonna recently?



FROM THE BOOKSHELVES

Two new books are due out any day now by two of skepticism's most interesting and controversial thinkers. You might want to keep your eye out for *Freedom Evolves* by Daniel Dennett and *A Devil's Chaplain: Reflections on Hope, Lies, Science, and Love* by Richard Dawkins. Our deadlines have been pretty tight and so we haven't had a chance to read or review either yet, but advance reviews have been good. Dennett tackles the tricky and controversial problem of evolutionary theory and free will and puts forth some interesting and controversial ideas about how the problem can be reconciled. Dawkins, according to an editorial review online at Amazon, offers in his book "his first collection of essays on what matters most to him and should matter to all of us. *A Devil's Chaplain*," the review continues, "resounds with Dawkins's piquant rallying cries against pseudoscience and other follies. Eloquently, avidly, he dissects religion, mysticism, and even today's educational methods."

We will have more on both books in the future. In the meantime, if any of our readers are interested in reviewing either book for the *SORTified News*, send your review via e-mail (preferable) to: kitray@quiknet.com . . . or send your hard-copy review along to us via U.S. mail to SORT, P.O. Box 2215, Carmichael, CA 95608.

AND ON THE NET

You can get some recent and interesting insights into the thinking of Dennett in his article *Postmodernism and Truth* at <http://www.butterfliesandwheels.com/articleprint.php?num=13>. And you can find a good informal interview with Dawkins at <http://www.guardian.co.uk/Print/0,3858,4602226,00.html>.

A PINKER ALERT

If you were intrigued by *The SORTified News* review of Steven Pinker's *The Blank Slate* that appeared a few issues ago, read the book and/or read the excellent piece on Pinker in the March/April issue of *The Skeptical Inquirer*, you might want to follow up with the interesting testimony (and question and answer session) given by Pinker at The President's Council on Bioethics, March 6, 2003. You can find it at [http://www.bioeth-](http://www.bioethics.gov/transcripts/march03/session3.html)

BOARD OF ADVISORS:

Juliana Manoliu
Electronics Engineer

Terry Sandbek
Psychologist

Robert Sheaffer
UFO Specialist, Author

Bob Steiner
Magician, Author, Bunco Expert

Lauress Wise
Mathematical Psychologist

About the Founding Members:

Ray Spangenburg and Kit Moser are a husband-and-wife writing team specializing in science and technology. They are co-authors of 52 books and over 100 articles, including publication in the *Skeptical Inquirer*, and they are former co-editors of the *Bay Area Skeptics Information Sheet (BASIS)*.

For more information, contact:

SORT (Sacramento Organization for Rational Thinking)
Phone (916) 978-0321
Email kitray@quiknet.com

[ics.gov/transcripts/march03/session3.html](http://www.ics.gov/transcripts/march03/session3.html). No matter where you stand on the controversial and complex issues of bioengineering, Pinker's comments make for enlightening and thought provoking reading.

WHERE IS KINNEY HIGH SCHOOL? (NEW MEETING PLACE FOR SORT!)

Just off Highway 50: Traveling east, Zinfandel Exit to Folsom Boulevard; traveling west, Sunrise exit to Folsom Boulevard. Then:

(1) Traveling west on Folsom Boulevard, turn left on Kilgore Rd., just past Sunrise. Or, traveling east on Folsom Blvd., turn right on Kilgore.

(2) Turn right into the Kinney High School parking lot. The library is in the building just south of the parking lot, and the entrance is on the west side of the building.

RATIONAL COMMUNITY CALENDAR

March 26: *SORT Meeting*

Topic: "A Nation of Victims?"

Time: Wednesday, 7:00 p.m., Room One (Library),

Place: Kinney High School Library, 2710 Kilgore Road, Rancho Cordova.

Everyone is welcome and all meetings are free.

April (Date to be announced): *Sacramento Skeptics*

Dinner meeting.

Topic, Time, and Place: To be announced.

For details, contact Richard Kowaleski at
kowaleski@earthlink.net

April 13: *AOF Meeting*

Speaker: Freethought activist Vince Wales

Time: Sunday, 12:00 p.m.

Place: Sierra II Community Center, 2791 24th Street, Room 10. (South of Broadway).

Visitors welcome. *Cost:* Free

© 2003 by Ray Spangenburg and
Kit Moser. All rights reserved.

SORT

*Educating Ourselves
and Educating Others*

**Sacramento Organization
for Rational Thinking
P.O. Box 2215
Carmichael, CA 95609-2215**

ADDRESS CORRECTION REQUESTED